

“Experiencing God in Worship”
Psalms 112, John 15:1-8

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Why do we come to church every Sunday? Sigmund Freud, who was a great psychiatrist and neurologist in the 20th century said that he could not understand Christians, their ritual of worship or their repentance prayers each Sunday. He believed that one time of repentance would be good enough for receiving forgiveness. He did not understand why Christians go to church **every Sunday**. He believed that this was neurotic behavior. On the other hand, a protestant reformer, John Calvin confessed that he was committing yet another sin in doing repentance prayer. Perhaps these two ideas create a gap between what we want to do and what we are actually doing. Maybe, we probably need to be in worship more than once a week? In Christian tradition, God is the Creator, the source of life, everlasting and we are God’s Creation. I imagine that everyone has his or her own spiritual relationship with God and reason to come to church. But it is clear we are here to make a personal connection with God. What does *a personal connection* mean to you? My baby Jacob always wants to sleep with Mommy. Just as a baby wouldn’t go to his or her own bed but want stay with his parents, we want to be connected to God because we need love, grace and mercy from the source of life. This morning, I want to talk about the meaning of “being connected to God”.

Today’s Scripture readings give us inspiring images of ‘connections’ between God and us. The Old Testament reading describes Jerusalem as the house of the Lord. The ancient Israelites believed that God dwelled in the city of Jerusalem and lived with his people like a family in the house. Our Methodist founder, John Wesley illustrated our relationship with God using a metaphor of house. He describes how grace is a connection point and how we build our relationship with God. He talked about three levels of grace. He first compared *prevenient grace* to the *porch* in front of the house. When we experience prevenient grace, God has invited us into the house, but we haven’t yet accepted the invitation. We are still standing just outside the door. Secondly, *justifying grace—the door*. John Wesley compared justifying grace to the door of the house. When we respond to God’s invitation and open the door into God’s house, we are right with God and have assurance that our sins are forgiven. Last, *sanctifying grace—the interior*. When we enter the house, and once we’re in the house, there are a lot of rooms for us to explore. Sanctifying grace is the grace that guides us when we’re inside the house, helping us mature in faith and live a holy life.

The New Testament reading illustrates our relationship with God using the image of the vine and the vinegrower. Let me read again a couple of verses. Jesus says, “⁴ **Abide in me as I abide in you.** ⁵ I am the vine, you are the branches.” Eugene Peterson’s paraphrased Bible translates these verses this way, ⁴ “**Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you.** In the same way that a branch can’t bear grapes by itself but only by being joined to the vine, **I am the Vine, you are the branches.**” What does it mean, “Abide in me as I abide in you”? Or “Live in me. Make your home in me just as I do in you.” Jesus reminds us that he is the vine which is the source of life. Branches cannot survive without being attached to the vine. In addition, without branches, the vine doesn’t mean anything. Branches bear fruit. God and we live as family together in the same house. God, the vinegrower created the world and continued to love us even though we, human beings, wanted to be disconnected from God. Jesus Christ came to connect us back to the vine for life and guide us to bear fruit. He also promised us the everlasting life if we are connected to him.

I want to share an illustration as explanation of what it means “to be connected to the vine, our Christ Jesus”. A young father was struggling the day of his wife's funeral, trying to put his son to bed. Both were numb with sorrow. The little boy asked, "Daddy, where is Mommy?" He tried to answer the question, but the little boy kept asking, "Where is Mommy? When is she coming back?" After a lot of attempts to satisfy his son, the father picked up the little boy and put him in his own bed. Finally, the little boy reached out his hand through the darkness and placed it on his father's face, asking, "Daddy, is your face toward me?" Given assurance, he said, "If your face is toward me, I think I can go to sleep." The father lay beside the young son and prayed, "O God, the way is dark and I do not see my way through right now, but if your face is toward me, somehow I think I can make it." That is what it means to know that we can abide in him and he abides in us.

Our God, the vinegrower will continue to care for us and nurture us as long as we are on the vine. Church is another branch of the vine. We are called to love, grow and bear the fruit of the vine. What are signs of living church? Our mission is to continue to reach out to our neighbors and people who haven’t heard about Christ Jesus sharing good news that ***you are not alone. God is with you! God loves you!*** On our life journey, there are so many thorns, barriers, challenges and difficulties that threaten our lives and want to discourage us. We need faith to stay on the source of life and be strong and tenacious to be connected to Christ Jesus. We have no fear, if we really believe Jesus is with us and with God, we can pass through the valley, and feel secure no matter what and where we are in the storms of life. We can live this way because God is with us, we are children of God. Believe this! Take courage. God lives in you! Amen.